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CHRISTMAS.

A Poem.

BY EDWARD MOXON.

—My vexed spirit blamed
That austere race, who, mindless of the glee
Of good old festival, coldly forbade
Th' observance which of mortal life relieves
The languid sameness, seeming too to bring
Sanction from hoar antiquity and years
Long past.

C. LLOYD.

LONDON:

HURST, CHANCE, & CO., ST. PAUL'S CHURCH-YARD.

MDCCCXXIX.

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JAMES NICHOLS, PRINTER.
2, WARWICK SQUARE, NEWGATE STREET.

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TO

CHARLES LAMB, Esq.

AS A TOKEN OF THE KINDEST REGARD,

The Following Poem

IS MOST AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED,

BY HIS OBLIGED,

AND WHOLLY DEVOTED SERVANT,

THE AUTHOR.

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CHRISTMAS.

HAIL, CHRISTMAS! holy, joyous time,
The boast of many an age gone by,
And yet methinks unsung in rhyme,
Though dear to bards of chivalry;
Nor less of old to Church and State,
As authors erudite relate.
If so, my harp, thou friend to me,
Thy chords I'll touch right merrily;
For, O 'tis sweet, 'tis sweet to trace
The joys that furrow'd care efface:
For nature, fretful nature, wears
Too oft a look bedimm'd with tears;

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Too oft we find that sorrow's gloom
Depressing haunts us to the tomb.
Hail, CHRISTMAS! hail! to cheer us sent,
Like yonder full round-faced moon,
When most we need, with merriment:
Hail, long-anticipated boon,
With smiles to dissipate the folly
Of life's splenetic melancholy:
Now that the Autumn's gone, and sear
The hollow-moaning woods appear,
Whose foliage scant betrays the road,
That led to innermost abode;
Where late harmonious sounds would rise,
When Cynthia rode thro' star-lit skies,
Smiling, with beams of steadfast glow,
To see her worshippers below,
Tripping the deep-encircled mead,
Like shepherds to the joyful reed.
There would they pass the live-long night,
In fairy revels their delight.

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With flow'rets crown'd there would they dance
Beneath her captivating glance;
When Spring, or Summer, rose in pride,
With more than usual joy allied;
Or Autumn, lovelier still, tho' sear,
The sweetest daughter of the year.
Now leafless is their sacred shade,
And open every grove we see;
Fled, those that round the fountain play'd,
And hush'd the voice of revelry.

Weary beneath a gloomy sky,
No pleasure to relieve the eye;
Dull, friendless, as the dreary night,
When absent every gem of light;
Trembling we move beneath the storm,
That pities not our feeble form;
Nor aught abateth of its rigour,
Blowing with unremitted vigour,

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As though 'twould mock our hapless state,
And mingle cruelty with fate.
No looks but fretfulness display,
The *season's type;* while day to day
Still follows, desolate and drear,
With scarce a ray the soul to cheer;
And snow, and wind, and sleet, and rain,
Make ev'n philosophy complain.
Cold, shiv'ring, to his labour goes
The man whose toil must food supply,
With thrice-accumulated woes,
The slave of stern necessity.
He only leaves his low abode;
Like desert, else, the dreary road.
Thus comfortless and dull without,
The weather ever full of doubt;
Here hypochondriac we sit,
While round us vap'rish demons flit,
The offspring of a gloomy mind,
To musing sullenness inclined;

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Imprison'd, mute, shut in together,
Like drooping fowls in rainy weather,
We meditate, repine in sorrow,
Or feelings sympathetic borrow.
Nor groves nor vales our steps invite,
  Nor minstrel cheers us with his song;
Alone, in miserable plight,
  We drag time's heavy chain along.
Yet, like some isle, amid the ocean,
  That, tow'ring, lifts its fertile head,
There comes a joy; all are in motion,
  From palace to the humble shed;
A joy which makes the chilness drear
Of Winter hallowed appear;
—No thanks to thee, rude cheerless state,
Unsocial, ever desolate;—
A charm, which maketh ev'n thy howling,
Tho' hoarse, soft as the gentle knolling
Of village bells, when, chiming gay,
They ring for bride or holiday;—

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A charm that clothes the barren scene
With gladness beautifully green;
Making thy moanings sounds of pleasures,
Attun'd to light harmonious measures;
Changing of aspects drear the face,
"And giving sterilness a grace:"
So that, where late rush'd down the showers,
And clouds in darkness frown'd above,
Up seem to shoot rejoicing flowers,
Emblems of happiness and love.

Who, who but hails the approaching car
Of CHRISTMAS, ancient, jolly king!—
Welcome as is the Evening Star,
Which ever kind repose doth bring.
Stately he comes; crowds cheer the way,
With shouts enlivening the day.
There, foremost, Plenty, glad we see,
With gen'rous Hospitality;

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Devotion, calmly kneeling bright
Beneath her own celestial light:
Next these,—the Heaven-born Sisters three,—
Faith, Hope, and smiling Charity:
In union come the lovely Graces,
Good-nature pictur'd in their faces:
While Youth and Beauty join the scene;
The latter robed as a Queen,
Graceful her figure, as she moves
With mien that modesty approves;
Delight sits thron'd upon her brow,
Which fairer is than Ida's snow;
While from her eyes, those twins of light,
Streams pleasure, eloquently bright.
Her tresses dark as raven's plumes
A starry galaxy illumes;
While on her cheek health finds repose,
Nor Summer sweeter paints the rose.
Music is every word she breathes;
And bliss it were those lips to kiss;

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There smiles are playing,—fancy weaves
In Heaven no greater joy than this.
Masque, Mirth, and Laughter, close the scene
With garlands made of ever-green,
While youthful voices joyous halloo,
And swell the pompous train they follow.

Thus CHRISTMAS jovial comes with aid,
Lest Winter triumphing pervade;
Or melancholy chill the soul,
If wholly left to his control.
May I thy influence round diffuse,
Enliv'ner of domestic joy,
Perchance the humble to amuse,
Or momentary care destroy:
Happy if but to raise the smile,
Or sorrow of a tear beguile;
Or once a faded bliss recal
From yonder venerable Hall:

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Tho' rude in numbers, yet sincere
Each wish the heart has breathed here.
Smile, Goddess, smile thro' every line,
Nor tinge the modest cheek of Love;
But fairest images be mine,
As sanction'd tho' they were above.

Come, come, ye sprites, on tiptoe throng,
Weaving the merry dance along;
Come haste, and leave your caverns rude
For cheerful hearths, your solitude;
With me come raise the mistleto,
Nor watch the moments as they go;
But tread them lightly while we may,
Ere youth and vigour pass away:
For life is fleet, soon dim the scene,
And then we muse on what has been,
But never, never more will be.
With Age comes grave Reality;

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'Tis Youth that wins alone the smile,
Which would the wrath of time beguile,
Could he but feel or taste the joy
He ever striveth to destroy.
Yet, ere we sing of mirth and glee,
'Tis meet we turn aside, and see
The cause of this our revelry.

O First Created, blest and free,
Sole partners of that unity
From which sprang Peace and gentle Love,
And Virtue nurtur'd as above,
Devotion and that tranquil spirit
The truly good alone inherit;
To you, so blessed once, we owe
The bitter cup we drain below.
Brief, brief your reign, 'twas but a breath
Ere guilty Sin ensued and Death.
What ills arose, and what dark fate,
When ye fell from your high estate,

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Let deep pathetic bards rehearse;
My theme requires a cheerful verse.
And fitter 'twere for me to tell
The after-mercies which befel,
When loud in heaven the Saviour's voice
Compassionate bade all rejoice;
When, crown'd, He left his seat above,
His Father's Messenger of love.
An angel host led on the way,
Marshall'd in mightiest array,
Whose trumpets sohok the trembling earth,
As when first called into birth.
Despair and Sin both stood aghast,
And Death, to hear the awful blast.
Man and Redemption was the song,
Which rose the spheres of heaven among.

O Muse, I love thee, and would more,
Could'st thou on loftier pinions soar:

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For holier Bards in better day
Have hymn'd their pious years away
In praise of Him, whom Prophets long,
On Zion's ever blessed hill,
By inspiration hail'd with song,
Where heavenly Music lingers still.

Thrice glorious theme, what harps with thee
In Judah oft have loudly rung,
To Psalms and holy melody,
With more than earthly rapture sung,
Till every vale and every stream
Resounded with the sacred theme!
From Carmel's heights to proud Hermon,
From Jordan's banks to Lebanon,
This was the hope, the song divine,
The proudest boast of Palestine.
'Twas sweetly sung, and softly play'd,
The vesper lay of pious maid,

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A theme belov'd, a sacred Pæan,
The joy of humblest Galilean:—

" Rejoice, O Judah, weep no more,
For soon thy troubles will be o'er.
Clap loud your hands, and raise the song
With praises sweet and praises long.
He comes, He comes to reign with you;
Who kings and all things shall subdue.
He righteous comes to judge the poor,
And scatter wide the evil-doer.
Sweet as the rain descends on earth
To give the vales a flowery birth,
He comes the Messenger of peace,
Who shall the flock of heaven increase.
Kings here to Him shall bend the knee,
Whose kingdom is from sea to sea.
Tarshish and Sheba glad shall bring
Each presents from their mighty King.

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Nor shall His kingdom fail; as soon
Shall cease to give her light the moon.
He comes the mountain-tops upon,
As leaps the kid on Lebanon;
Glad as the gentle hart or doe,
He cries aloud, 'Arise, for, lo!
The Winter rude is past and gone:
Arise, my love, and fairest one.'
He comes, of David's house; the same
The Prophets did IMMANUEL name.
Be glad; the warrior's work shall cease:
He comes, the mighty Prince of Peace."

This was the song, the joy, when free,
And hope of Hebrew minstrelsy.
'Twas ere beneath the Roman yoke
They bent the neck themselves had broke,
Or from Jehovah chose to stray,
Turning for other gods away,

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Tho' sought, and oft besought again,
By Priests and Zion's holy men.
Then Judah had her songs forgot,
And all her mighty deeds of yore;
Tho' long He call'd, she listen'd not,
But evil follow'd as before:
Tho' oft He would have been their guide,
And led them with a Shepherd's pride.
A wand'ring outcast to this day,
By every vile oppressor bent,
She treads her dark unpitied way,
To nations round a monument.

Afar, 'neath yonder mountain blue,
The sun in majesty has set;
All things are cloth'd in sable hue,
Hid grove, and mead, and rivulet;
All, save yon summit's crown of snow,
Which shines, tho' all is dark below.

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When, lo, above a star is seen,
With light to glad the human race,
Such brightness ne'er did intervene
'Twixt earth and heaven's eternal space.
'Tis like the ray which breaks upon
The foundering bark when hope is gone,
And shows the harbour nearly won,
Illumin'd by the breaking sun;
A star to raise and glad the eye,
Nor sets it in fair Araby.
Brighter its orient hue to us
Than is the glow of Hesperus.
In Egypt ne'er was known to shine
A beam like this of Palestine.
It is the star so long foretold
By Judah's Prophets, when of old
They struck the harp in their distress,
To soothe them in the wilderness.
Its light is seen and known afar;
For eastern sages gathering are,

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That they, returning, may to men
Proclaim the love of heaven again.

'Tis night, no breath disturbs the calm;
Sleeping the flocks securely lie,
Where olives shed their dewy balm;
Yet are the tender shepherds by,
Guarding their folds from rude alarm,
As mothers wont their babes from harm,
When suddenly the heavens are bright;
They, sore afraid, behold the light;
For lo! a sun-bright angel there
Is moving thro' the midnight air.
They bend, they kneel, they droop with fear;
The gentle stranger draweth near:
Music that instant fill'd the skies,
When spoke the messenger, "Arise;
I bring you tidings glad of peace,
Which shall the joys of men increase.

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To you this day a Saviour's born ;
Go seek Him, nor the manger scorn,
For there, tho' lowly, ye shall find
A babe, the CHRIST, to bless mankind."
Instant a heavenly host were nigh,
And praises were their symphony :
" Peace upon earth, good-will to men,"
Singing, they rose to heaven again.

The shepherds all around are gazing ;
The babe is in its mother's arms ;
The worshippers are glad and praising,
While fled are all their fond alarms.
With temper'd mirth and awe they see
The Saviour's meek nativity.
Their simple joys with heart elate
Our song would feebly imitate.

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Come, Spirit, wont of old to raise
  The bard on Zion's holy day,
Whene'er he took the harp of praise,
  Ere fallen captive, led away,
Ere, sorrowing in the stranger land,
His harp lay broken on the strand.
Come Mirth, inspiring Mirth, and Glee,
And all ye Nymphs of Revelry.
Let this my winter-evening's lay
Pass with serenity away.
'Tis sung to cheer a lowly wight,
Who seeks 'mong faded years delight.
Long toil has dimm'd his youthful eye,
His harp his only luxury.
Deem not his hours in waste consum'd,
  Nor vain the purport of his song;
The joy he sings hath oft illum'd
  His path, life's weary scenes among.

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December winds blow cold and hard,
The kine leave not the bedded yard;
The meadows now are drear and dark,
And billows toss the chained bark;
The wintry streams rush down the hill,
And all the little vallies fill.
While wrathful twirls the air with ire,
We gather round the winter fire.
'Tis then the cheerful hearth around
In converse various all we see;
Where oft retiring Virtue's found,
With Love and youthful Modesty..
There Beauty smiles, decking the shade,
A lily?—No, a fairer flower.
'Bove semblance is the artless maid,
The joy of those within her bower.
Books now their pleasing charm supply,
The mirrors of reality;
With games such as awake the mind,
If to philosophy inclined.

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Music too lifts her accents smooth,
With notes to elevate or soothe:
While young Affection like the rose
Opens her bosom in repose,
Which glows beneath the fostering beam
Of home, where life is but a dream,
And care a name for social love,
Such as exists all strife above.
Nor can their generous minds but deem
The world a charitable stream;
'Mid these too all that Joy can bring,
The gloom of Winter to betray:
'Tis sweet, as is the morn of Spring,
To pass the evening thus away.
Nor would I change the cheerful hour,
Tho' driving storms without may lower,
For all that warmer climes possess,
Lands of surpassing sunniness.
No; England, comfort is with thee,
Thy shores for ever shall be mine;

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Where reigneth sacred Liberty,
And Joy and Truth, and Love divine.

Where now the softness lately breathing
From hill, and vale, and tuneful wood;
Or, Summer with her clusters wreathing
Around the margin of yon flood?
Where now the merry voice of Spring,
Or leafy Autumn on the wing?
Where rose, or, scented eglantine,
Or, bond of love, the sweet woodbine?
Where foxglove, semblance fair of youth,
Or lily, purer still, of truth?
Where the hedge-roses' fragrant row,
With peeping primrose from below?
Where fled the lilac's varying hue
From silver white to violet blue;
Or hawthorn's bloom that scents the shade,
When Spring comes forth a lovely bride,

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In robes of purest text array'd,
To be with May, sweet May allied?
Not one now blooms; wither'd and fled,
Each floweret lies among the dead:
So all that is most fair must pass,
Like morning dew upon the grass.
Yet still there's heath, tho' scatter'd rude,
Emblem of bards and solitude;
Smooth holly gay, with red berry;
A type of hospitality.
The cypress yields her mournful dew,
While flourisheth the sable yew;
Ivy and box with hopeful mien,
Unchanging, still continue green;
Nature's costume, when all around
Of gayer hue lie on the ground.

Forerunners cold of Christmas, now
The unremitting winds do blow.

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The rain descends in thicken'd mass,
And patters loud against the glass.
How do I grieve for those that be
Now tossing on the billowy sea!
Methinks I see them wreck'd and cast
On ocean, clinging to the mast;
Or, pale and ghastly, quit the oar;
And rise, and sink, to rise no more.
Brave, generous, honest hearts of oak,
Your sufferings pity thus provoke.
May He, who walk'd upon the sea,
Stretch out His aiding arm to ye!
Then vain the storm, and vain its wrath;
He lights ye o'er the trackless path.

As passions violent soon subside,
  Stillness prevails with cheering sway:
The raging winds, tho' loud, have died;—
  So tyrants breathe and pass away:

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Nor aught remaineth of the storm;
He hideth now his awful form.
The sky is bright without a cloud,
The fields have got a winter shroud;
And frost-work glitters on the spray
  Beneath an ever welcome sun,
Who proudly spreads his beauteous ray,
  As tho' a triumph he had won
O'er Winter and his legions drear,
Awhile impeding their career.

Hark, hark, that merry loud huzza!
'Tis like the cry of "Hounds away!"
It comes from yonder breaking school,
Where riot reigns in place of rule;
True harbingers of mirth and glee,
Children begin the revelry.
Ah, happy boys! ye well may shout,
And leap with frantic joy about!

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Yours is no common bliss, I ween;
Such joy will seldom intervene,
When ye in life shall take a part,
Perchance with a too tender heart;
O then ye'll think on buoyant youth,
When all around was simple truth;
And gaze perchance, as I do now,
Tho' young, with care upon my brow.
If toil like mine should be your share,
Poor youths, ye have my humble prayer.
Away!—these thoughts shall not intrude,
They're meeter for my solitude.
Ah, oft I've paus'd to mark the ground,
Where all your merry sports went round;
At morn and Summer's eve to see
Your games of deep intricacy.
O then I've wish'd, beholding joy,
I were again a careless boy.
And thou, dear Sisson, cordial friend,
Do youthful joys thee still attend?

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Tho' learned rank and high degree
Have proudly been conferr'd on thee,
Will not the sight of this recal,
When thou wert foremost in the brawl?
For youth is youth in every age;
Philosophers, not always sage:
Those, giving laws to time and space,
Were foremost once to join the race
Of such as then were light and gay,
As these now on their holiday.

O happy youths! a world of joy
Awaits ye at this season drear;
And who would limit or destroy
Your boon? Not he who lingers here.
Go, and your fancies realize;
Leave others to philosophize:
For pleasure lingers not like pain;
Time soon will bring you tasks again.

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Never in captive's dungeon tower
Was like-anticipated hour.
Go, little prattlers, bless the scene;
There are who long have waiting been,
And many a Mother's anxious eye
Looks for her household deity;
And many a Father longs to bless
His Daughter in her loveliness;
And many a tear for joy shall flow,
Which scarce the cheek itself shall know;
For sweet affection, like the sun,
Shall dry whate'er it shines upon.

Go, scenes of mirth await ye now
In rich variety of hue:
Which, careless of the critic brow,
We venture further to pursue.
For some shall mimicry combine;
Here is the Christmas pantomime;

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With him, who loud applause shall win
For tricks, the colour'd Harlequin.
For you, my fair ones, nor repine,
There is the graceful Columbine.
For you who shout, there's arch Buffoon,
And his twin brother Pantaloon;
With more than here can be express'd,
For those who laughter love and jest.
And O the joys which Winter yields!
The snow, the ice, the coursing fields,
There healthful pleasures without peer,
Enliven the else dreary year.
What joy can like to *sliding* charm,
When youthful blood is glowing warm?
Or, when the fleeting skate shall sweep
The brittle surface of the deep;
Or, when the fleeter hound shall view
The timid hare, and it pursue,
With men and boys exulting all
To see the panting victim fall!

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These all await to cheer ye, when
Ye shall arrive at home again;
Yea, e'en the snarling cur shall twine
Around your little legs, and whine,
As tho' he would your welcome show,
And offer all he can bestow.

Come, Kate, there is the evergreen,
A token Christmas long shall grace;
The windows too are bright and clean,
In them you may behold your face.
Come, deck them with a tasty hand,
As wont they've been for many a race.
They rise at once in sweet command
From her, the genius of the place.
Now stir again the crackling fire,
'Twill mirth and cheerfulness inspire;
For ere another day shall peep,
Or night her slow departure take,

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Our hearts in gladness we will steep,
Nor pleasure's path again forsake,
But blithely sing the eve and morn,
On which our hopes anew were born.

December never shone more clear
Than now, when all things round appear
As tho' with brightness they would crown
The eve which brought salvation down.
The fields, tho' cloth'd in partial snow,
Shew thro' their white a crimson glow,
And every bush is glittering seen,
Tho' not array'd in Summer's green;
And every spray with frozen dew
Reflects its party-colour'd hue,
As now they shine gay in the sun
Who has his joyful round begun.

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All, all are cheerful on this day
And hail the hour, whichever way
We turn; and, if towards the town,
'Tis bustling ever up and down.
There coaches rattle by in glee,
With hamper stow'd, and plump turkey;
Perchance the pie, and savoury goose,
With game, aud all good things for use.
Here dainty lamb salutes the eye,
And beef all sprigg'd with rosemary.
Or, if we leave the city's throng,
And gaze the rural fields among,
There all are joyous, all are gay;
The sparrows chirp upon the spray;
While yonder is a busy group,—
I hear their merry laugh and whoop,
As they the fleeting ball pursue,
Which quickly boundeth from their view;
While some with slide, and some with skate,
Swift follow, nor the chase abate.

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The sun has left the peaceful glen,
And sunk down in the west again;
Nor has he long retired, ere soon
Shall rise again the placid moon,
Who in the heavens as bright shall shine,
As once she shone in Palestine,
Ere, seeking, they found Jesus, when
He cradled lay in Bethlehem.
Now glorious is she in the sky,
With her attendant galaxy:
And foremost there in bright array,
Where all is beauteous display,
The evening-star in purple vest
Leads onwards to the studded west,
Slow following him, whose farewell ray
Shoots upward thro' the Milky-Way.

Now has the merry scene begun,
'Tis one bright blaze around we see;

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'Twas signal soon as set the sun,
And rose yon beacon deity.
A thousand hearths are cheerful now,
And smooth'd the lately rugged brow.
The woodman leaves his axe to wield,
And quits the solitary field.
The cotter, or the grey-hair'd sire,
Afar beholds his sparkling fire,
Gleaming among the leafless trees,
That hide not its realities:
Rejoiced much in heart to see,
As slow he winds the peaceful glen,
Illum'd his humble privacy,
Sequester'd from the haunts of men.
The ploughboy whistling comes with glee;
Hark, sweet his native melody!
'Tis like the warbling that would say,—
"O blessed be the eve and day,
Which gives to me and all my race
A hope of joy unknown before;

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And blessed be the proffer'd grace
Of Him who lives for evermore."

Hark, music! And lo! yonder see,
Remnant of ancient revelry,
The hall is lighted up with green,
Around the Christmas candles sheen,
Where, useless now, are hung aside
Trophies, of chivalry the pride.
The warrior's helmet, buckler, lance,
Tho' rusty, now receive the glance
Of what they erst were wont to prize,
" From store of ladies, whose bright eyes
Rain influence," giving zest to all,
Where feasts or feats of honour call.
Fair too, as those who sought the field,
When yon huge antlers as a shield
Adorn'd a noble stag one morn,
As ever fled 'fore hound or horn,

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Which Beauty scorn'd not then to see,
Up, rivalling the blushing day,
Nor doubted was her purity;
'Twas sweet to see her lead the way
On palfrey seated, prancing, white,
Bearing its burden with delight;
Or when the hawk, happy to linger,
Was born thro' meadows on her finger,
Nor less importunate to rise,
If scann'd by lovely woman's eyes.
'Twas ere those implements of pride
Our sporting fathers threw aside,
Which now in grandeur deck the hall,
Like banners o'er the fretted stall.

The yule-clog now is on the fire,
Whose blaze shall cheerfulness inspire.
Custom nigh obsolete is here,
'Tis lit with part of former year;

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'Tis thus the blaze from sire to son
In one continued line doth run,
Nor would I wish that it should die;
'Tis Christmas in reality.
The Harper too, with Minstrel's aid,
Is come, nor has he long delay'd
With lively jest or song to cheer
This merriest eve of all the year;
And youthful sprites shall be afloat,
When they shall hear his merry note.
Here gather'd are the young and old,
Some come from far beyond the sea,
Their wild adventures to unfold
'Mong aunts deep read in pedigree;
And bachelors, by the world oft wed,
Nor less for gallantries renown'd,
Whose hearts in love have often bled,
Yet never were by Hymen bound.

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Around the hearth may now be seen,
With recollections fraught elate,
Each one of grave and steady mien,
Our fathers of an ancient date;
Their talk is of the olden days,
Enliven'd by the cheerful blaze;
Old customs that are on the wane
They wish they could revive again;
And deep lament that fashion's sway
Should sweep good times, for these, away;
Of horses, fox and hounds, they tell,
And scenes by them remember'd well,
Comparing with the present race
Their bold companions in the chase.
Superior then the sports of youth
They argue, and appeal to truth.
Somewhile on other themes they fix,
And gravely talk o'er politics.
Whig, Tory, or whatever name
The patriot may choose to claim,

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United here, discussion free,
On points pre-eminent agree;
As genial streams that various run,
In final tendency are one.
And many an author learnedly
They quote with jocularity,
And many a tale from standard lore
They have for Christmas time in store;
And well they know what Shakspeare writ,
And Swift's grave humour, Butler's wit;
Rare Jonson, and the tuneful race
Of dramatists, with them have place;
With lively Sterne they too can joke,
And yet not levity provoke.

And here a circle who retain
(Maidens in wedlock never twined)
Without reproach their father's name,
To lone celibacy resign'd;

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Peace to yon clamorous urchins, hist!
While these pursue their steady whist:
Here Fortune blind,—as is that Boy
Who often Fortune would destroy,
If Reason came not with her sway
To drive the loiterer away,—
Lurks, secret as a treasur'd thought,
Ere to a consummation brought,
With those who least suspect the tide
That favours, rolling to their side.
As now the varying cards run high,
And foe with sister foe contends,
We Fortune's favourite descry,
While hope o'er each alternate bends.
What eye than *that* ere brighter shone,
Proclaiming now the rubber won?
Or *this*, her honours lost confessing,
Yet still her gentleness possessing?
Pleas'd thus they mark with equal grace
Diversity of fortune's face;

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And yet, like generous foes of old,
A smile, a willing smile we see
From maiden lips itself unfold,
Towards a conquering enemy.

If pleasure still we would pursue,
Or scenes of infancy renew,
'Tis here the very stream of joy
That ripples on without alloy,
As doth the mountain rivulet,
Ere with impediments beset,
That choak it, striving to be free,
As care the soul's hilarity.
Nor will we here neglect to sing
Their joys now buoyant on the wing.
Perchance 'twill call those pleasures fled
Of youth, which us so captive led;
For boyhood, virtue-like, we may
Contemplate, and again survey.

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Lo, where a noisy merry set,
Christmas and *Innocence*, are met;
Blithely at varied games they play
As each alternately shall sway;
Pursuing now in frolic's bloom
The Blind-man's-buff around the room;
Nor shuns each elder youth the sport,
They mingle where the fair resort;
And *they* are there, and long have been,—
Without them 'twere a dreary scene.

Methinks of all the views of life,
In various climes, we mortals see,
None are so pure, so free from strife,
As those of juvenility.
'Tis now the hour their sports shall cease,
In order doubly to increase;
Like fairies when they seek the bower
To suck, bee-like, the honey flower,

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That they may feel the juicy boon,
And gayer dance beneath the moon.
Sing, Goddess, now, or gently say,
What is the cause of this delay?
For time, like pleasure on the wing,
To midnight fast is hastening.
'Tis CHRISTMAS that has brought his hoard,
And spread it on the festive board;
And who his bounty will refuse?
None here, for all have other views.
O glorious time, bringing delight,
And much for youthful appetite;
Lo! there roast beef of hugest size,
'Tis sprigg'd with rosemary—the prize;
Such as old Christmas hath in store,
'Twill last till nigh the season's o'er.
Nor shall aught else be wanting here
Of blithe festivity or cheer.
As sweetest flowers are often found
Creeping upon the lowest ground,

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So here mince-pie, that favourite long,
And worthy of the boast of song,
Graces, as anciently, the feast,
A type of offerings from the East;
Of all our signs we shall not see
Than this a greater luxury.
And here from Christmas who would fly?
We have his boasted frumenty,
Preferr'd by all, but most by those
Who would not customs old oppose.
Nor can there be who would forsake
The spiced ale, or nice yule-cake,
Cross'd with the sign of Him who bled
With all our sins upon his head.

. . . . .

The hall is clear'd, the Bard has ta'en
His harp, so famous for its skill,
And wakes harmonious mirth again,
Each animated breast to fill.

Digitized by Google

Hail, Music, hail! Here all confess
Beneath thy sway their happiness;
In joy or grief belov'd art thou,
Yet, never, never more than now.
Thy presence cheers the humblest dwelling,
Care, pain, and poverty repelling;
With thee delighted Age we see,
As he had been in Infancy,
When soft from watching Mother's tongue,
At eve, the tenderest notes would fall,
When "Hush my babe!" was sweetly sung,
Sleep, gentle slumber, to recall.
What palace ever held, or bower,
Hearts gladder than are here this hour?
Tho' days of bright romance have fled,
Since first this hall was opened
With all that heart, eye, could desire,
Or chronicler of old admire:
And many a Christmas it has seen
With banquets numberless between,

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It speaks of courtly Knight and Squire,
Of Lady's love, and Dame, and Friar,
Of times, (perchance not better now,)
When care had less of wrinkled brow;
When she with hydra-troubled mien,
Our greatest enemy, the Spleen,
Was seldom, or was never seen.

Now pledge they round each other's name,
And drink to Squire and drink to Dame,
While here, more precious far than gold,
Sits womanhood, with modest eye;
Glances to her the truth unfold,
She shall not pass unheeded by.
Twas *woman* first with health did greet,
When Vortigern did Hengist meet;
'Twas fair Rowena, Saxon maid,
In blue-ey'd majesty array'd,

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Presented 'neath their witching roll
To British Chief the wassail bowl.
She touch'd to him, nor then in vain,
He back return'd the health again.
Thus 'tis with feelings kind as true
They drink the tribute ever due,
Nor would they less, tho' truth denied it,
Their love for woman would decide it.

Right merry now the hours they pass,
Fleeting thro' jocund pleasure's glass.
The yule-clog too burns bright and clear,
Auspicious of a happy year:
While some with joke, and some with tale,
But all with sweeter mulled ale,
Pass gaily time's swift stream along,
With interlude of ancient song;
And as each rosy cup they drain,
Bounty replenishes again.

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Ah happy time! hours like to these,
Tho' fleeting, never fail to please.
Who reigns, who riots, or who sings,
Or who enjoys the smiles of kings;
What preacher follows half the town;
Who pleads, with or without a gown;
Who rules his wife, or who the state;
Who little, or who truly great;
What matters light the world amuse,
Where half the other half abuse;
Whether it shall be peace or war,
Or we remain just as we are;—
Is all as one to those we see
Around the cup of jollity.
Old age with joke will still crack on,
And story will be dwelt upon;
Till CHRISTMAS shows his ruddy nose,
They will not seek for night's repose,
Nor this their jovial meeting close.

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If now we would the cot survey,
Each there is happy in his way:
The yule-clog there too cheerful glows,
And merriment on all bestows.
Those too have each their cake and ale,
With game and legendary tale,
And all that antiquated joke,
Or wit of rustic could provoke;
Such carols as of old were sung
On Christmas-eve by neighbouring young
When they, the offspring of the poor,
Went singing round from door to door;
And minstrels, tho' of wilder tone,
Yet in accordance with their own.
O season blest 'bove all to me,
Thus others' happiness to see!
Loud rings our isle with joy this night,
'Tis universally delight.
May every heart within now share
Its long anticipated prayer;

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And when the evening shades shall close,
May pleasure linger with repose.
Fair may the sacred morn arise,
Each blessing with its auspices,
And thankfulness the sacrifice!

'Twas midnight ere they closed the Hall,
Where late we sang of festival;
And now in slumbers sweet they lie,
Such as pass o'er the youthful eye,
When care haunts not the pillow'd head,
Nor dreams, but by enchantment fed.
Deserted now the frequent way,
Night rules with more than quiet sway,
While bright above the stars are beaming,
The earth from sable gloom redeeming.
Superior, yet advanced far,
The moon rides in her silver car.
The heavens reflect nor cloud, nor dew,
A sea of sweet unruffled blue;

Digitized by Google

Where twice ten thousand sail there be,
At anchor riding gloriously.
Each revel's o'er ; no sports intrude
Upon the ear of solitude.
In slumber hush'd the feasters lie ;
The owlet long has ceas'd to cry.
No sound, save yonder iron knell
The ne'er-returning hours to tell.
Mute Nature pauses, not a breath,
Calmness enjoying still as death.
'Tis such a night as spirits love,
That undisturbed they may rove.
From palace to the lowly shed
In peace each rests his drowsy head,
While on yon dimpling wave the moon
Proclaims it midnight's solemn noon ;
Reflected there 'tis sweet to trace
Enchantment streaming from her face.
Purple and white the waves appear,
As they their little bosoms rear.

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Who now can look around and see
Earth clad in peerless majesty,
Nor feel within his glowing breast
A holy, tranquillizing rest?

Sudden as thunder from above,
Hark, thrilling sounds burst on the ear;
Yet gentle as the voice of love,
That startles not dull night with fear.
Enchanted with each swelling note,
Fair maiden listens unapprized,
Nor knows she of the joy afloat,
To her a dream 'tis realized;
And soft as fairies' lute could be,
Or wild Æolian melody,
Which fills with plaintive notes the vale,
When Zephyrs scarce the chords assail.
'Tis as when 'neath Venetian star
Is heard the mariner's guitar,

Digitized by Google

Stealing the window lightly by,
With song of love or liberty:
Notes by Castilian lover play'd,
Or gallant to Italian maid,
His soul-awakening serenade.

Nor can aroused slumber deem
It real, but suspects a dream.
'Tis as the heavens open'd were,
And this the music of each sphere.
So sweet each sound, so still the hour,
The soul to think has lost her power
Nor earthly can it fancied be,
But rite of high solemnity;
The parting of a holy spirit
From this dark world we here inherit,
By bands angelic led, whose care
Must be to waft it through the air
To bowers of green eternal bliss,
With heavenly music such as this.

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Memory now wakes as from a trance;
The welcome notes still high ascend,
While near the goodly train advance,
Proclaiming loud their pious end.
Delightful 'tis thus rous'd to be
With relic of old minstrelsy.
They have announc'd, " It is the morn
On which our Saviour dear was born;"
Their harps have told it, nor will we
Withhold our chorus merrily.

Silence again her reign shall keep
Presiding o'er us while we sleep,
Till loud is heard to pierce the ear
The crow of noble chanticleer;
Till morning comes with dewy feet
From yonder mountainous retreat;
Or blithe the merry bells are ringing,
A token Christmas is beginning.

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Then ere the sun a beam has woke,
Or reveller his slumber broke,
Or from domestic sleep has fled,
Or aged porter left his bed,
Loudly is heard to shake the door
The little urchins' shrilly roar,
Who fast as echoes back reply,
" A merry Christmas!" louder cry.
Arous'd all hear the joyous call,
While " Christmas" vibrates thro' the hall.
Nor is their earnestness in vain,
Who first shall there admittance gain.
Bounty, the rich man's best defence,
Their breathings kind shall recompense;
Conscious of which they warmly bawl
Their customary wish on all.
From house to house they gladly go,
Imploring joy on friend and foe;
Nor cot remote, howe'er depress'd,
But will receive its morning guest,

Digitized by Google

Who with his smiling face shall pass
The compliments of old Christmas.

The sun now glows as tho' from heaven
His brightest beams this day were given;
He glitters through the winter sky
As tho' 'twere Summer's canopy;
More splendid never shone his ray,
Than now upon this holy day;
'Tis as with glory he would crown
This morn of Christian renown.

Ye affluent, bless'd with worldly store
Above your lowly fellows round,
Shut not 'gainst charity the door,
But rather let your hearths abound
With plenty, nor let coldness shame
Your fathers' hospitable name.

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This is the season bless'd, when ye
Should smile on helpless poverty.
Behold the Widow at your gate,
The female orphan desolate,
The beggar aged, weak, and blind;
To these O never be unkind.

O could my humble Muse inspire
The heart too often led astray,
Or quicken in the breast desire
Of good, I'd raise the lofty lay,
And call each ruin'd wall to tell,
What deeds of charity befel,
When heard was yonder convent bell.
O could these mouldering piles arise,
And offer up the sacrifice
Which long was wont with smiles to cheer
Benighted pilgrims wandering near,
And all who weary sought its aid,
As beggar or as prince array'd!

Digitized by Google

There monk, with ever ready hand,
Like good Samaritan would stand,
With consolation's balmy voice,
Bidding the poorest guest rejoice.
O could we people as before,
Or the fall'n edifice restore,
And see the good old faithful friar
With flock assembled round the fire,
As when upon this festive morn
He clothing dealt around, and corn,
And made each humble guest to feel
The venerable church's weal;
O could we but revived see
The good old hospitality;
How would it foil and put to shame,
Of modern alms the boasted fame,
And all that we now bounty name!

The Village now, from noise remote,
Breathes but the harmonizing note

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Of gladness, which with pride we see
  Reflected from each rustic face,
That mirror of simplicity
  Whence joy shines with peculiar grace;
While deck'd each window is with green,
Enlivening the winter scene.
The bells, too, blithe their changes ring,
And joys associated bring;
As neighbours friendly neighbours meet,
Their complimenting wishes greet;
" A merry Christmas," " Happy year,"
Impartially accosts the ear.
Youth, age, and ranks alike bestow
Boon pleasure's realized glow.
As now I gaze on the world's glass,
And view unseen the groups that pass,
It brings to mind years long gone by,
And feats of antique pageantry,
When rous'd the village were to see
The motley crowd of revelry,

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Dress'd up in gaudy rich display,
To solemnize the merry day.
These, these have long their pomp resign'd,
Yet live in chroniclers behind.
To them like days of bright romance
We cast a retrospective glance,
And gaze and smile to see below
Fantastic maskery and show;
Tho' here no pageant is essay'd,
'Tis happiness without parade.
The sweetest music now I hear,
Comes warbling from the window near.
'Tis not the noisy fife or drum,
But little Robin, for his crumb
Blithe carolling his morning-lay,
As minstrel would his patron pay,
Ere forc'd, like him, the world he flee,
To sing alone his melody.

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Now holier thoughts awake my rhyme,
The village bells with pealing chime;
And sweeter far their notes to me
Than those of loudest revelry.
To yonder heaven-pointing spire
Is bent the charitable Squire,
Where consecratcd branches spread
Their weeping tendrils o'er the dead;
While there the elm and sable yew
Lend all their ruggedness to view.
Nor shield they now with leafy bloom
The villager's unsculptur'd tomb;
As when, with summer foliage crown'd,
They hid from gaze each little mound.
Lo, where a goodly blooming train,
The maiden artless, and the swain;
They hear the summons from afar,
And gather where the holy are.
The aged sire there bends his way,
No staff his feeble arm to stay,

Digitized by Google

But *one* whose joy has been to share,
As now, thro' life his pious prayer.
They hie their tribute just to pay
To Him who lengthen'd has their day;
Within yon deeply shaded pile
Where meek Religion's seen to smile,
As if the wayward to beguile;
While deck'd with modest evergreen
Her sanctuary may be seen;
A token sure of heavenly grace,
Befitting such a holy place.
The Squire upon his bended knee,
With all his family we see,
Gracing the velvet-cushion'd pew,
With every meek observance due.
O may each humble heart now share
The church's venerable prayer,
And may this day of all the year
The best and holiest appear;

Digitized by Google

And 'mid our deep affliction show
The bliss unmerited below,
Which Christ descended to bestow.

O could I picture next throughout,
Delightful CRABBE, with half thy skill,
The grand preparatory rout,
Now hastening Christmas to fulfil;
From palace to the cottage down,
Festivity my theme would crown,
And deeds deserving well of praise,
In meed of this the day of days!
The grey hair'd sire,—his hopes are crown'd,
He has his family around;
'Tis now perhaps his eye, wax'd old,
Their last assembling shall behold.
From far each stripling now has come
To see his Mother and his home;
To cheer with hopes her fondest breast,
And be again his Father's guest;

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To tell all he has felt and seen,
And where his wanderings have been.
Young maiden too with rosy bloom
Shall dissipate the Winter's gloom,
And gather from her far abode,
Unmindful of the wind or road;
And each remember'd object then
Shall bring her happiness again;
The porched cot, the rural scene
That skirts the closely-nipped green;
The fields where she was wont to stray
In infancy the years away.
Yet as to home her steps draw nigh,
The tear shall wet her anxious eye,
Afraid lest aught of hap or harm
Anticipation should alarm;
Thinking of ills that might befal
Her parents dear, and her appal.
'Tis joy that apprehendeth fear,
As home affection draweth near.

Digitized by Google

Methinks, if for no other gain,
Good Christmas here were not in vain.
'Tis an instructive sight to see
Gather'd the scatter'd family;
To mark the enviable spot
Where plenteous fare's the homely lot,
With every little feud forgot.

Beneath the humblest roof we may
Each laughter-loving group survey;
Their little parlour deck'd with green
May to advantage rare be seen;
The whiten'd hearth, the chimney row,
With polish'd iron grate below.
A Robin near, too, often heard;
And there a portrait, "George the Third;"
And here a print, 'tis Hogarth's "Harlot,"
Close by the late good Princess Charlotte!
A sampler fram'd, with Rules of Health,
And Franklin's standard Way to Wealth.

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There, too, in one thick towering column
Is rang'd each well-read dog-ear'd volume.
The Holy Bible first is seen,
Which long a register has been,
That holds within its sacred page
The records of a moulder'd age;
The name of many a sire and son,
The day each first his life begun,
And when their little race was run.
A History, England's Rights and Charters,
With Fox's Book of blessed Martyrs.
Here Bunyan, with the Psalter, lying,
And Taylor's Rules for Holy Dying—
A few odd volumes, Murders, Treasons,
With Baxter's Rest, and Thomson's Seasons.

As morning dew is seen to rise,
So smoke now curls towards the ceiling,
Much to the joy of youthful eyes
The ponderous round of beef revealing.

Digitized by Google

Nor care they what may grace the Hall,
Or what to dainty palate fall,
While they have now upon the board,
With this, plum-pudding richly stor'd:
Fare such as those who love the chase
Love most, when finish'd is the race.
Let others boast their wines of age,
Bourdeaux, or costlier Hermitage;
The humble host shall not bewail,
While sparkles his October ale;
Nor shall his joy the less appear,
While mirth and jollity abound,
For this his homeliness of cheer,
Shar'd with his hearty neighbours round.

Hush'd all within is now the din;
Shadows but flit before the eye;
Gather'd are all to mirth within,
While darkly lowers the winter sky,

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Showing the torch-lit Hall from far.
Nor brighter shines earth's glowing Queen,
When, seated in night's silver car,
She rides the fleecy clouds between.
Superior still it beams, with glow
Re-animatiug all below;
Lifting its window'd wide expanse
To catch the passing gazer's glance;
While bright below its lofty beaming
The humble cots are seen, too, gleaming;
Satellites these of low degree,
Yet sparkling in the galaxy.

Lo! where the logs are burning bright;
High guests are gathering to the sight;
There England's pride, her Maidens fair,
Shed fragrance through the yielding air,
While Youth, and Grace, and Love combine
In charm each other to outshine;

Digitized by Google

Yet sweetly blending like the rays
  Which settle on yon mountain's side,
Attracting oft the stranger's gaze,
  When Phœbus smiles at eventide.
The Hall its ancient pomp displays,
Peculiar to this day of days;
Where grave and gay, youth, age appear,
  Alike determin'd to enjoy
The long-anticipated cheer,
  Which soon their leisure shall employ.
Beneath the gaze of heavenly eyes,
That speak their own pure ecstacies,
The costly banquets rich are placed,
Which kings might condescend to taste,
Nor host, nor guest ashamed be
Of this their hospitality.
Advancing lo! the silver tray,
  Spread out with garlands, that would vie
'Mong those that crown the brow of May;
  With evergreens and rosemary.

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Its slow approach towards the Hall
Bids minstrel loud for carol call;
A shout, a mingled joyous din,
Betrays the Boars-head coming in,
While carol, harp, and minstrel's voice,
Bid all the company rejoice.
The trophy now with antique grace
Supplies its customary place.
The Knighted loin and pheasant pie,
Deck'd with devices daintily,
The turkey and the savoury chine,
In delicacy here combine,
With all luxurious pride would share,
From hunter rough, to lady fair.
Such choice of good old English store
Did rarely grace the Hall before,
But at a solemn time like this,
When friends conspire in mirth and bliss,
And kindred hearts in zeal are burning
To greet old Christmas-tide returning.

Digitized by Google

With cordial looks th' attentive host
Proclaims the seasonable toast;
And, emblem of departed years,
The massy wassail bowl appears:
Within the stream of friendship flowing,
Good fellowship on all bestowing,
The heart awakening to a sense
Of feelings that might recompense
For lov'd associates far away,
With whom we spent life's early day.
Around the ancient goblet moves,
Nor is there guest but it approves,
Tho' maidens with a coyer sip
Just hallow it with rosy lip.
Within all hearts in mirth are met;
It is the flowing rivulet,
That glides with sweet enchanting note,
And leads to joyous seas remote,
Where barks of pleasure gaily float.

Digitized by Google

And lo! a train of revelry
Sweeps in, in antique colours dress'd;
And of the rout the foremost He,
Lord of misrule—ruling the rest.
See where they come, a tittering band,
To frolic at their king's command,
Who leads the way, a jolly wight,
For many a year each youth's delight.
As CHRISTMAS forth he comes array'd,
A very Falstaff in his trade;
In quaint attire, big as the knight,
With wond'rous paunch and appetite;
A face beneath a steeple hat,
As yonder moon full, round, and fat;
A cloak of green 'neath wreaths of holly,
A nose with Bardolph's that would vie,
Complete old CHRISTMAS marching jolly;
With wand he will not fail to ply
About the recreant limbs of those,
Who dare his majesty oppose.

Digitized by Google

With him a half-blown rose array'd,
As dame MINCE-PIE in rich brocade.—
Next, Robin Hood in Lincoln green:
A blither groom was never seen.
His cap with golden tassel gay,
  Beneath a roguish laughing eye:
Who would the archer disobey,
  Or lightly pass the outlaw by?
With him also in rustic dress
  Comes fair maid Marian, blue ey'd belle;
A flower of forest loveliness,
  Whose looks speak more than words can tell.
With these a wild-wood outlaw throng
Of merry bandits pace along;
Stout Scarlet, Locksly, Little John,
With merry Midge the miller's son,
And Friar Tuck with rosy gills,
To rouse the deer in brakes and hills.—
Away the antics frolic gay;
  On tiptoe frisk the dance they tread,

Digitized by Google

Like Fairies in the month of May,
With Puck mischievous at their head.

Delighted sports! continuous flow,
Ev'n till the bird of dawn shall crow;
And gathering beams of light portend,
Your midnight revels now must end.—
Enough for me, in homely rhymes,
If I an image here present
Of joy, and honest merriment,
And hearts that beat in full concent,
Both high and low with one accord,
In honour of our gracious Lord,
Of Christmas, and the good old times.

THE END.

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